

APP TASK FORCE MINUTES

October 18, 2001

7:00 PM

Jane Fellner, Chair

Attendance: Kelly Bradford, Mary Elayne Dunphy, Jane Fellner, Alex Ginn, Heather Holmback, Candace Jacobson, Sally James, Courtney Jelaco, Hal Kimball, Marissa La Madrid, Nian She, Marian Sussman, Katherine Triandafilou, Bob Vaughan

The minutes from the September meeting were approved with no changes.

SCHOOL REPORTS

GARFIELD: There was no representative from Garfield. Jane sent Ms. Derse an invitation to come to Task Force meetings and she indicated that she will try to come or send a representative in the future. Parents reported that Garfield had a very good and well-attended curriculum night.

WMS: There was no representative from Washington Middle School. WMS has begun a room parent program akin to Garfield's.

LOWELL: Hal Kimball reported that there has been a very good beginning to the school year, including a very successful curriculum night. Two major issues currently being worked on at Lowell are technology and report cards. The new computers should be coming soon and they will start working on how to implement the new technology in the classroom. As for report cards, the staff has been working with Edie Holcomb on how to apply the district report cards to the APP program at Lowell. A compromise has been reached whereby Lowell will fill out the district report card but use the higher level benchmarks (2 grades above) in reading and math.

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

Bob informed us that he has resigned his job as Highly Capable Coordinator. He has taken a position as Associate Director of the Academy for Young Scholars at the University of Washington. He will be developing a program for high school juniors to enroll in the UW Honors Program. This program is intended to enhance the status of UW as an option for very bright students. The program is distinct from Running Start and from the UW Early Entrance Program.

In the month of October, Bob will be working with Edie Holcomb to transition out of his job. He reiterated that the Highly Capable Program is in good hands with Edie as Director. Bob will help with highly capable evaluation, identification, and admission this fall; and this year this process will remain exactly the same. Bob promised to stay attuned to our APP issues and encouraged us to work with Edie and stay involved in the school district as advocates for highly capable students.

Everyone expressed their great appreciation for all the important work that Bob has done over the years.

APP PARENT COMMITTEE REPORT

Courtney reported that there will be a school board candidate forum at Lowell on October 22, co-sponsored by the Urban League, to talk about gifted issues. (James Kelly, of the Urban League, has expressed interest in participating in discussions of gifted and disproportionality issues.) The candidates will provide written answers to questions ahead of time and then discuss these at the forum. There will not be questions from the floor but there will be some time for one-on-one interaction between the candidates and attendees.

There will be a general APP parent meeting at Lowell on October 23. Bob will discuss the general characteristics of the program and current issues. Donna Christensen will also be there to talk about the lobbying efforts.

The APP parent group meets the first Saturday morning of every month and organizes activities such as Lobby Day, APP transition meetings, and new parent meetings. Anyone interested in participating can get more information from Courtney Jelaco or Jim Corcoran.

THE DISPROPORTIONALITY ISSUE

In response to the NAACP's concerns about disproportionality in the Highly Capable program, Esther Greenfield, a lawyer and parent, has offered to meet with them to provide information about APP and other aspects of the programs. Bob will meet with Esther to help her prepare for the meeting. Jane is soliciting a parent volunteer who participates in APP Task Force to attend the meeting with Esther and the NAACP.

In the ensuing discussion, it was mentioned that the Seattle School District has a disproportionately high number of minority students in relation to the student population of the city of Seattle. The highly capable programs are not as disproportionate, with relation to minority participation, when compared to the population of the city as a whole. In addition, there is some confusion as to what exactly is meant by "disproportionality." Hal pointed out that, at Lowell, it really is a matter of "underrepresentation."

HIGHLY CAPABLE REVIEW PROCESS

It was noted that the school board has been critical of Superintendent Olchefske's handling of the Highly Capable Review process. The biggest criticism has been that community engagement began too late in the process.

Several parents wondered about the results of the highly capable survey that was sent out to all parents last year. Bob reported that there was a lot of support for self-contained gifted programs by the survey respondents, whether or not they had children in the program.

Jane summarized the current working groups for the highly capable review process: how to increase access, increase capacity, and develop delivery models. There is a highly capable review committee meeting next week. Parents should contact Jane if they are interested in being involved in a working group. Also ideas can be written up and submitted to the committee.

We discussed several ideas and issues related to the highly capable review topics:

The best way to expand access is for every school to try to identify and encourage their highly capable students. Schools may need incentives for doing this to mitigate losing the students (and their test scores) from their regular program.

Since there is uneven achievement in the district, it is hard to have the same expectations for each school or area. In those areas where there is lower achievement, programs could be set up for those most qualified in that school or area, even if they would not have exactly the same criteria and curriculum as the highly capable programs in other areas. As teachers may want to keep their best students, principals would have to be involved in solving that access problem. Clubs could be set up for high-achieving minority students.

There is a need to serve those children who get into APP but whose parents don't want them bussed to Lowell, because of time/distance or other reasons. There is a need to have expanded APP services or an improved Spectrum program as a viable alternative. There are lots of reasons children who qualify do not go to Lowell and they need to be adequately served.

A large problem is the variability among Spectrum programs. This may cause a difference in numbers of qualified students from year to year and make it difficult for schools to adjust. The changing of school assignment methods also contributes to this.

Superintendent Olchefske maintains that set-aside seats are not necessary to have a successful self-contained highly capable program at a school. But many parents don't see how this is possible when schools cannot easily expand or decrease capacity from year to year. Consequently, it becomes rather anti-choice for Spectrum students.

MISC

Candace Jacobson, new 4th grade teacher at Lowell, spoke about a summer program at MIT for high school students that qualify. She is willing to serve as a liaison between MIT and interested students. She also noted that the Puget Sound MIT alumni association has a goal of improving education and is eager to be involved in helping the schools and mentoring students. The alumni association is getting funding from industry for this purpose and Candace suggested that schools with APP kids could connect up with them. Nian She mentioned that WMS is setting up a Discover Young Scientists program and they are in need of mentors.

Nian She reported that he led a group of 9 WMS students (6 in APP/Spectrum) in attending the Washington State legislative assembly. The students went to learn about the legislative process and had a very positive experience. The issues they identified as important were highly capable services, bullyproofing, and homelessness.

The next Task Force meeting will be Thursday, November 15, 2001. Task Force meetings are the third Thursday of each month, unless there is a conflict with another event for a large number of regular attendees.

The meeting adjourned around 9:30.

Submitted by:

Heather Holmback,

APP Task Force Secretary